

authorities. But It was otherwise with the poor and the heretical. We have positive proof that the Bishops denounced the dissemination of the English Bible among classes and persons prone to heresy, burnt copies of it, and cruelly persecuted Lollards on the charge of reading it.<sup>1</sup> The high price of a large manuscript work, and the difficulty experienced by many laymen in reading, were also found to be very grave hindrances to the propagation of the book. These practical difficulties in the way of spreading a knowledge of the Scriptures, of which the opposition of the Church was only one, were no doubt a serious check to the success of WyclifVs movement. He wished, as he and his followers continually repeated, to base religion on the Bible instead of on Catholic tradition.<sup>2</sup> Until the Scriptures could be more generally studied, Catholic tradition was certain to maintain its place for want of a rival.

If one thing in particular can be said to have prompted Wycliffe's violent denunciation of the Church authorities, Italian and English alike, it is the hatred he felt for the practices they encouraged in connection with their doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. Perhaps the most real change which has taken place in the ordinary Englishman's view of life is the complete abandonment of mediaeval ideas as to the pardon of sin. The pardon of sin was thought to turn on certain specific acts, which it was the duty and interest of the priesthood to see performed. These acts can be roughly grouped under four heads : corporal penance; pilgrimage, which in one aspect was a form of penance; purchase, which was the commutation of penance; and lastly, special masses for the dead, which differed from the other methods in being vicarious and post-mortem. Penance, as we have seen, was already at this time yielding to purchase, the sincere to the less sincere, a fact ominous of the decay of the whole system. But pilgrimages and masses for the dead were still fashionable and flourishing. WyclifVs attack on them was made against a widely spread and popular system.

<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 342.

<sup>2</sup> Matt., 255-62 ; *S. E. W.*, iii. 362 ; Matt., 284-5 ; *Polemical Works*, ii. 405.  
Matt., 33, 70, 266, 89, and 94 ; *Opus Evangelicum*, *passim*. Q g. i. 79, 368  
« God's  
Law' = the Bible, e.g. *S. E. W.*, iii. 234, line 24.